

Sketch

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Dad's Here

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Abstract

THE room whirled into focus as I gently nudged old Pal aside and looked hopefully at the short squat figure of Dad in the easy chair. But he was asleep, his mouth hanging wide and empty, and his fingers intertwining across his chest, chopping his breathing into irregular snores...

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The weight of my overnight bag drew my arm like gravity. Dad hadn't said much when I'd left last Monday. No advice or comment, except that half-amused, "Don't miss your train, honey." I had felt his words though. He knew I was mixed up and afraid—like the first day in high school with a jumble of innumerable halls and monstrous people. Tom had had two days in Chicago after basic, and Tom's mother and I had rushed to be there. Tom had been excited, aloof. Khaki coat, khaki hat, khaki pants. Army, army, army! And guns. No wet lilac bushes, or burnt cookies. No gay fishing trips with Tom's blue eyes, so full of fun, and Dad's twinkling green ones.

A fly perched on one of Dad's bushy eyebrows and crawled up the smooth coppery surface to pause between the sparse black hairs. The light, sifted by the lace curtains, spotted his weathered face and betrayed the deep lines. "I can wake him," I thought hopefully. "But he must be awfully tired—to sleep in the middle of the afternoon." His heavy farm boots held his legs upright in the dirty jeans—just in from chores. The newspaper slipped from his gnarled fingers and teetered on his knee, its dark headlines fearful even in upside-down language.

Suddenly, like a guilty child, he snorted and his eyes flew open, their deep crinkles converging in an arrow. "They're green," I noticed happily. When Mom was sick or money short, Dad's eyes were deep blue; when things were normal, this laughing speckled green—kind of human barometers, they were. Their greenness now was anxious, questioning. I stared back, answering. No, it wasn't so good, Dad. I don't like khaki, khaki, khaki! Or the quietness in Mother Norton's eyes.

He waited. Dad, I guess I just don't like growing up. Anything about it. I don't like going to Chicago; or seeing Tom—or anything!

His eyes dropped as he carefully folded the newspaper and laid it aside. His voice was low, rumbling. “Missed ya the last few days, honey; where ya been?”

“Tom’s gone now, Dad,” I stammered. “To the West Coast—” Suddenly I wanted to curl up in his arms again and bury my tears in his neck and be safe and warm and unafraid.

“Train ride was rough, eh? You look like ya needed a little sleep, honey.” His eyes denied the brusqueness of his words. He struggled to his feet, and, as usual, I was faintly surprised when his chunky body was taller than mine. His broad nose pointed to my forehead.

“Glad to have you back, Child.” His lips brushed my cheek. His whiskers scratched. “Your mother’s still in town. I’ll take your bag upstairs. How about cooking me some of your extra-special eggs?”

His voice and eyes were pleading, “C’m on, snap out of it child. Everything’ll be okay. C’m on, honey, your dad’s here. The words he didn’t say bubbled into my body, warm and secure.

“Okay, Dad. Eggs coming up!” I squeezed his rough hand, and smiled back into his green eyes.

